

INQUIRY AND COMPLAINT PROFILES

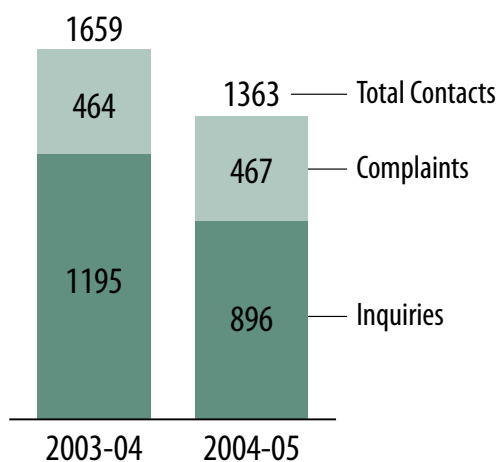
The Ombudsman listens to families and citizens who **contact** the office with questions or concerns about services provided through the child protection and child welfare system. By listening carefully, the Ombudsman is able to respond effectively to their **inquiries** and **complaints**.

This section describes contacts made by families and citizens during the reporting period of September 1, 2003 to August 31, 2004 and the reporting period of September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005.

Contacts to the Ombudsman

From September 1, 2003 to August 31, 2004, families and citizens contacted the Ombudsman **1659** times. From September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005, families and citizens contacted the Ombudsman **1363** times¹. These contacts were primarily **inquiries** made by persons in search of information and assistance. Approximately **one third** of these contacts were formal **complaints** seeking an Ombudsman investigation.

Contacts to the Ombudsman



Source: Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, February 2006

Contacts. When families and citizens contact the Ombudsman, the contact is documented as either an inquiry or a complaint.

Inquiries. Persons call or write to the Ombudsman wanting basic information on how the office can help them with a concern, or with questions about the child protection or child welfare system.

The Ombudsman responds directly to these inquiries, some of which require additional research. The office refers other questions to the appropriate agency.

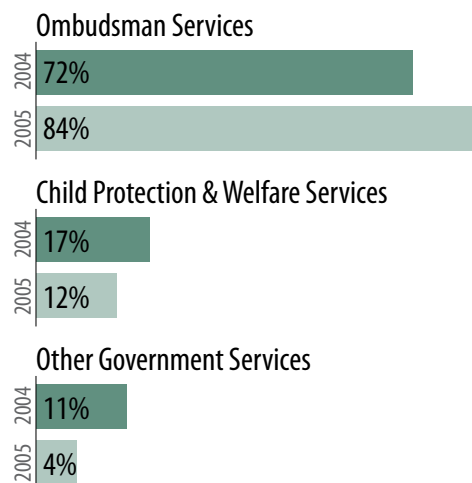
Complaints. Persons file a complaint with the Ombudsman when they have a specific complaint against the Department of Social and Health Services or other agency that they want the office to investigate. The Ombudsman investigates every complaint that is within its jurisdiction.

¹ The Ombudsman no longer documents non-OFCO inquiries, due to workload constraints. OFCO staff refer non-OFCO inquiries to the appropriate resource, such as other ombudsman, the landlord/tenant information line, or children and family ombudsman in other states.

Fielding Inquiries

In 2004, the Ombudsman received **1,195** inquiries from families and citizens who needed information at an average rate of **23 inquiries per week**.

Most Inquiries Seek Information on How the Ombudsman Can Help



Source: Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, February 2006

- **About 72% wanted basic information** on how the Ombudsman could help, how to file a complaint, and how to get a complaint form. If their concern involved the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration, OFCO explained that they have the right to contact the Office of Constituent Relations.
- **About 17% concerned laws, policies** and procedures for child protection and child welfare services. The Ombudsman does not provide legal advice or explain legal rights and responsibilities.
- **About 11% other government services.** The Ombudsman found out who to contact and referred these people to agencies that could help.

In 2005, the Ombudsman received **896** inquiries from families and citizens who needed information at an average rate of **17 inquiries per week**.

- **About 84% wanted basic information** on how the Ombudsman could help, how to file a complaint, and how to get a complaint form. If their concern involved the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration, OFCO explained that they have the right to contact the Office of Constituent Relations.
- **About 12% concerned laws, policies**, and procedures for child protection and child welfare services. Ombudsman does not provide legal advice or explain legal rights and responsibilities.
- **About 4% other government services.** The Ombudsman found out who to contact and referred these people to agencies that could help.

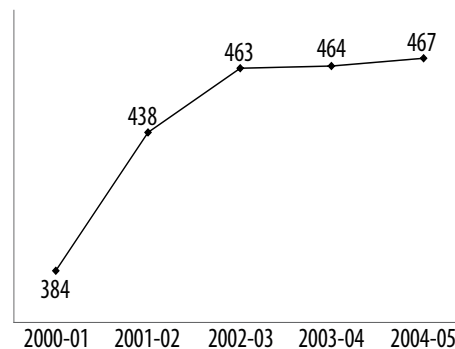
Receiving Complaints

A complaint to the Ombudsman must involve an act or omission by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) or other agency that affects:

- A child at risk of abuse, neglect or other harm by a parent or caretaker.
- A child or parent that has been the subject of a report of child abuse or neglect, or parental incapacity.

The Ombudsman received 464 complaints in 2004 and 467 complaints in 2005. The Ombudsman continues to receive a high number of complaints and the number of complaints filed with the Ombudsman shows no signs of slowing.

Annual Complaints to the Ombudsman



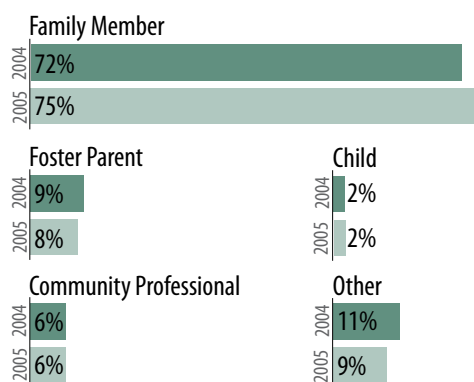
Source: Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, February 2006

Complainant Profiles²

Persons Who Complained

As in previous years, parents, grandparents and other relatives of the child whose family is involved with DSHS filed the majority of the complaints to the Ombudsman. The graph below demonstrates how constant these numbers were over the past two reporting years.

Persons Who Complained to the Ombudsman



Source: Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, February 2006

How they Heard about the Ombudsman

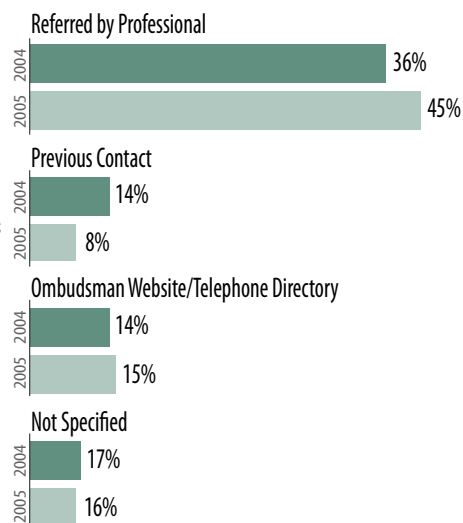
In 2004, 71 percent of individuals filing complaints with the Ombudsman indicated that they were referred to the office by someone else. Close to half of these individuals reported that they were referred by a community professional/service provider (e.g., teacher, counselor, child care provider, doctor, private agency social worker, mental health professional) or DSHS worker. Other individuals were referred by a friend or family member, the Governor's Office, an attorney, or a CASA/GAL. In 2004, 14 percent knew about the office from a previous contact, while 14 percent said they found the office via the Ombudsman web site or telephone directory.

In 2005, 77 percent of individuals filing complaints with the Ombudsman indicated that they were referred to the office by someone else. Over half of these individuals reported that they were referred by a community professional/service provider (e.g., teacher, counselor, child care provider, doctor, private agency social worker, mental health professional) or DSHS worker. Other individuals were referred by a friend or family member, the Governor's Office, an attorney or a CASA/GAL. In 2005, 8 percent knew about the office from a previous contact, while 15 percent said they found the office via the Ombudsman web site or telephone directory.

Complaints Involving DSHS

The Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration is the state's largest provider of child protection and child welfare services. It is therefore not surprising that the Children's Administration was the subject of 95 percent of complaints in 2004 and 93 percent of complaints in 2005 to the Ombudsman.³

How They Heard About the Ombudsman



Source: Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, February 2006

² Complainant profiles based on complaints closed during the reporting year.

³ The remaining complaints were directed against: Other DSHS divisions, Washington Courts, Division of Developmental Disabilities, local CASA/GAL program, DSHS contract providers, and tribal welfare services.

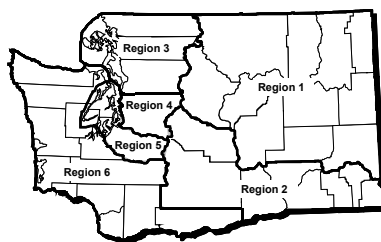
Of these, 95 percent in 2004 and 93 percent in 2005 were directed at the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which includes Child Protective Services, Child Welfare and Adoption Services, and Family Reconciliation Services. A small percentage involved the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR), which licenses and investigates alleged child maltreatment in foster homes, group homes, and other residential facilities for children.

Complaints against the Children's Administration by DSHS Region

	2004		2005	
	DCFS	DLR	DCFS	DLR
Region 1 Totals	58	3	55	1
Clarkston	0		0	
Colfax	0		2	
Colville	6		3	
Moses Lake	13		8	
Newport	1		0	
Omak	0		3	
Region 1 Central Office, Spokane	32	3	33	1
Wenatchee	6		6	
Republic	0		0	
Region 2 Totals	59	1	41	1
Ellensburg	5		4	
Region 2 Central Office, Yakima	5		2	
Richland/Tri-Cities	22		19	
Kennewick	1		0	1
Sunnyside	0		1	
Toppenish	1		1	
Walla Walla	13		6	
Yakima	11	1	6	
White Salmon	0		2	
Goldendale	1		0	
Region 3 Totals	78	0	81	2
Alderwood/Lynnwood	10		9	1
Arlington/Smokey Point	22		18	1
Bellingham	3		7	
Everett	17		15	
Friday Harbor	0		1	
Monroe/Sky Valley	3		3	
Mount Vernon	6		12	
Oak Harbor	8		7	
Region 3 Central Office, Everett	9		9	

DCFS - Division of Children and Family Services
DLR - Division of Licensed Resources

	2004		2005	
	DCFS	DLR	DCFS	DLR
Region 4 Totals	89	7	91	6
Belleveue/King Eastside	18		10	
Kent/King South	22	2	33	1
King West	24		17	2
Region 4 Central Office, Seattle	6	3	13	2
African-American Children's Services	14		11	
Seattle Centralized Services (include NA unit)	5	2	7	1
Region 5 Totals	59	1	68	1
Bremerton/Kitsap	9		23	
Region 5 Central Office, Tacoma	50	1	45	1
Region 6 Totals	66	3	60	1
Aberdeen	12		12	
Centralia	7	1	8	
Kelso	8		5	
Port Angeles	5		3	
Port Townsend	2		3	
Region 6 Central Office, Lacey/Olympia	9	1	1	
Shelton	4		4	
South Bend	0		0	
Stevenson	0		1	
Tumwater	4		0	
Vancouver	12	1	14	
Forks	2		2	1
Long Beach	1		7	
Statewide	4	2	3	
Central Intake Unit	4		1	
Children's Administration Headquarters		2	2	



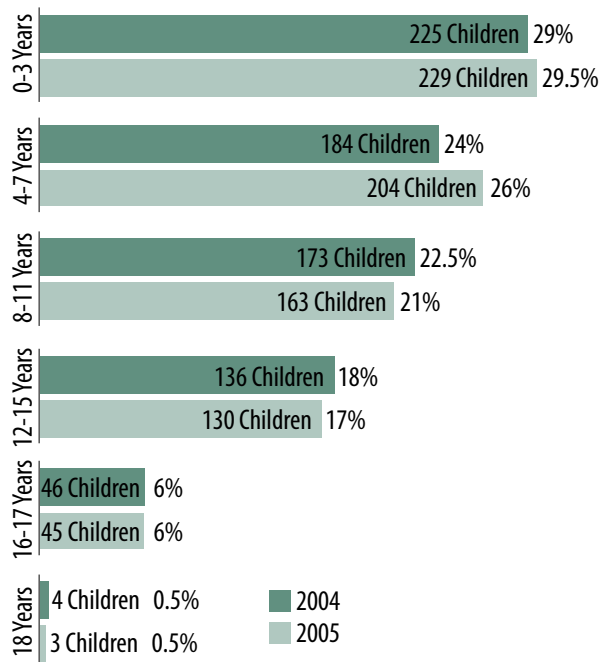
Complaint Issues

As in previous years, safety of children was frequently identified in complaints to the Ombudsman. Complainants were concerned with the allegedly inadequate response by the Department of Social and Health Services to the reported maltreatment of children living in their parents' care, as well as children living in foster care or in other substitute care. Concerns about family separations and reunification and the health, well-being and permanency of the children under state supervision were also identified in complaints to the office. The table below shows breakdown of complaints received in the three most frequently identified complaint categories.

Most Frequently Identified Complaint Issues

(Many complaints identified more than one issue)	2004	2005
Child Safety	218	164
Failure to protect children from parental abuse or neglect	156	109
Physical abuse	42	38
Sexual abuse	25	19
Emotional abuse	19	5
Neglect/lack of supervision	66	47
Other	4	--
Developmentally disabled child in need of protection/other	3	5
Children with no parent willing/capable of providing care	13	15
Failure to address safety concerns involving child in foster care or other substitute care	41	32
Failure to address safety concerns involving child being returned to parental care	5	3
Family Separation and Reunification	212	186
Unnecessary removal of child from parental care	54	34
Unnecessary removal of child from relative placement	18	16
Failure to place child with relative (including siblings)	53	36
Other inappropriate placement of child	9	5
Failure to provide appropriate contact between child and family	31	25
Failure to reunite family	42	50
Inappropriate termination of parental rights	5	11
Concerns regarding voluntary placement/service agreements for non-dependent children	--	8
Other family separation concerns	--	1
Dependent Child Health, Well-being & Permanency	75	88
Inappropriate change of child's foster/other placement, inadequate transition to new placement	27	19
Failure to provide child with needed medical, mental health, educational/other services, or inadequate service plan	24	26
Inappropriate permanency plan or unreasonable delay in achieving permanency	12	22
Failure to provide appropriate adoption support services/other adoption issues	9	16
Inappropriate placement/inadequate services to dependent/non-dependent children in institutions/facilities	3	5
Other Complaint Issues	22	18
Foster care licensing/foster parent issues	10	9
Breach of client confidentiality by agency	5	3
Unprofessional conduct by agency staff, harassment or retaliation	7	6

Ages of Children Identified in Complaints



Source: Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, February 2006

Most of the children identified in complaints to the Ombudsman were age seven or younger.

**Note: Some individual children were counted more than once because they were identified in more than one complaint.*